



City of Seattle

Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor
Barbara E. Wilson, Executive Director

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION January 13, 2005 MEETING NOTES

Commissioners in Attendance: George Blomberg, Chair; Tom Eanes, Chris Fiori, John Owen, Joe Quintana, Mimi Sheridan, Paul Tomita

Commissioners Absent: Anjali Bhagat, Mahlon Clements, Jerry Finrow, Matthew Kitchen, Jeanne Krikawa, Lyn Krizanich, Steve Sheehy, Tony To

Commission Staff: Barbara Wilson, Executive Director; Elizabeth Martin, Analyst; Robin Magonegil, Administrative Assistant

Guests: Chris Leman, Patricia Yannow, Eastlake Neighborhood Council; Bob Morgan, Central Staff

Call to Order

Chair George Blomberg called the meeting to order at 3:15 pm. noting that the Commission did not have a quorum so no formal actions could be made.

Approval of Minutes

Due to lack of a quorum, minutes could not be approved. SPC will approve December 9th minutes at the January 27, 2005 Full Commission meeting.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

Chair Report

▪ **2005 New Commissioner Recruitment**

Chair Blomberg gave an update on the status of the new Planning Commissioners for 2005. He commented on the interviewees' strengths. The Commission sent a slate of candidates to the Mayor's for review and for his selection for appointment.

▪ **Upcoming and Recent Activities**

Downtown Zoning Changes Open House - Chair Blomberg noted that there is a Downtown Zoning Changes Open House this evening and asked what the next steps would be after the public meeting. Commissioner Mimi Sheridan stated that the Commission should comment on the Downtown Zoning Changes but not tonight. Executive Director Barbara Wilson pointed out that copies of the Seattle Planning Commission's (SPC) comment letter on the Downtown Height and Density Changes Draft EIS as well as the response to the SPC's letter are included in Commissioner folders for review. Ms. Wilson added that there will be an additional opportunity to comment when the ordinance is sent to council for

review. She noted this will include hearings and public comment. Commissioner Sheridan relayed that Commissioner Lyn Krizanich had mentioned that a major part of the Denny Triangle Plan is included in the Downtown Zoning Changes. Commissioner Sheridan stated that she agreed that a Commission response and support for the zoning changes is appropriate, but that the SPC may have other comments as well after reading the Final EIS. Commissioner Chris Fiori asked if the base Floor Area Ratio (FAR) has changed and Commissioner Joe Quintana answered that it had. Commissioner Quintana stated that previously the first FAR was for parking and retail and after that density fees applied. He stated that after the zoning changes, the first FAR is part of the higher density piece raising the cost. Commissioner Quintana commented that if the intent is to encourage density, it seems contrary to raise the cost. He added that it seems that you would want to make it less expensive and easier to develop where the City wants growth and more expensive and more difficult in areas where the City does not want growth. Commissioner Quintana added that according to the environmental community the changes do not go far enough in terms of allowing growth downtown. He stated that the changes do increase heights and density and there are design restrictions.

Commissioner Sheridan suggested that the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and the Preferred Alternative be reviewed before commenting and that there be discussion at the next Housing, Neighborhoods, and Urban Center meeting.

Executive Committee Meeting & Vacancy - Ms. Wilson reminded Commissioners of the Executive Committee meeting on January 18. She also noted that there will be a vacancy on the Executive Committee with the departure of Commissioner Jeanne Krikawa who had been the at-large representative. She stated the replacement at-large member is needed on the committee at least through April adding that in April new SPC officers will be approved. She asked that Commissioners contact her or Chair Blomberg if they have an interest or recommendation to fill this spot.

Waterfront Open House - Ms. Wilson mentioned that the Waterfront Open House is February 9. She stated that there has been a strong recommendation from the joint Commission subcommittee to follow up with those involved in the early forums at this open house. Ms. Wilson added that last week's Design Commission/Planning Commission Waterfront Joint Subcommittee meeting was attended by Commissioners Mahlon Clements and Tom Eanes.

Commissioner Eanes reported that there was a presentation by Guillermo Romano from CityDesign on the draft concept plan. He stated that several commissioners expressed concern that a lot of the ideas that came out of the charrettes are being overlooked. Commissioner John Owen shared his concern that it is a strategy and not really a plan. Commissioner Eanes added that this was talked about at the subcommittee meeting and that some decisions need to be made about the surface especially concerning the Colman Street Dock and the width of the road at the dock. He expressed that the design of the tunnel surface is very complicated. Commissioner Owen asked how participants can provide feedback at the open house. He commented that charrette participants will want to stay involved in the process. He recommended that charrette participants should be able to actively participate in this process.

Commissioner Blomberg added that a lot of energy has gone into city activity and the city has absorbed it and is moving ahead. He added that it is not necessarily clear how the outcomes from the charrette have been integrated into the three draft concept plans that the interdepartmental team generated. Commissioner Blomberg expressed that some participants may wonder what happened to their ideas and ask why their ideas have been overlooked. Commissioner Eanes added that there is a matrix of themes generated by the 22 teams but it does not explain things very well. He commented that the graphics for the draft concept plans seem uninspired and that the discussion is also uninspired. He recommended that a figure ground would more clearly depict the waterfront. Commissioner Eanes added that the graphics are muddy and do not have a clear figure ground.

Commissioner Owen stated that when the City gathers information from the public it is useful for the public to be able to see how it has informed further steps. He added that otherwise there are long term affects on the City's ability to involve people in large scale efforts. Commissioner Owen pointed out that the SPC's name is on the public participation process and that the intent was for it to remain an inclusionary process. He stated that it appears that the project has gone into a black box and then emerges in a different form and that participants will want to see the linkages and participate.

Commissioner Eanes indicated that the transformation of 22 charrette team plans to three concept plans to one draft concept plan seems contrived and is not clear. Ms. Wilson pointed out that some big themes generated by the charrette teams are definitely represented and that particularly some of the broader themes have informed the City's direction. Commissioner Eanes responded that the process of moving from twenty-two plans to three and then to one has not been clear, it has been obscure.

Ms. Wilson stated that she would relay the Commission's suggestions and inquire if there will be opportunity for public input in the form of comment cards, online comment or a comment form included in the brochure that will be distributed at the open house. Commissioner Owen asked if the concept plan was not a spatial plan but an implementation plan with a strategy. Commissioner Eanes reported that Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) and Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) engineers have said that they need to make some surface decisions sooner than they had previously anticipated. He expressed his concern that coordination between SDOT, WSDOT and the waterfront planning effort may not happen in a timely fashion. Commissioner Quintana mentioned that he has been retained by Washington State Ferries to advise on the Colman Dock plans. He added that the road width is up to 240' and this is a concern. He stated that the road width is 240' wide at the dock and 180' wide elsewhere. Commissioner Eanes responded that the surface design problem is one of the most complicated. Ms. Wilson also noted that Commissioner Eanes will start to attend a Waterfront Partners Group which may evolve into the basis for a permanent committee.

▪ **City Center**

Commissioner Owen reported on the SPC Center City work session before the Christmas holiday. He explained that a parallel process is occurring and that a consultant, Daniel Iacofano of Moore, Iacofano, Goltsman, Inc. has been working with the Downtown Seattle Association. He stated that there is a lot of research to be done and wants to listen to see where the Mayor and the City are going with Center City. He hopes that the SPC can engage in a consulting role rather than just a review capacity. He added that Daniel Iasafano has been engaged in a contract with the City to develop a communications strategy. Commissioner Owen mentioned that there will be a meeting with Deputy Mayor Tim Ceis to discuss Center City.

▪ **Transportation Strategic Plan**

Ms. Wilson called the commissioners attention to the SPC's comment letter on the TSP that went out to Barbara Gray, SDOT staff. She commented that the timeline in which to comment was short and Commissioners comments were received after the December 15 comment deadline however Ms. Gray was glad to receive the Commission's input and will do her best to respond to them.

▪ **Light Rail Review Panel**

Chair Blomberg reported that the Panel made a recommendation on the Roosevelt Station alignment. The Panel will recommend the 12th Avenue station location. Commissioner Blomberg mentioned that it was going to cost anywhere from \$30 to \$60 million. He observed that from a transportation and urban neighborhood perspective the 12th Avenue station location was clearly what ought to be the preferred location. He added that there seemed to be no compelling argument for the I-5 station location beyond the reduced cost. Commissioner Owen stated that some felt there would be an equity problem between the north and south ends regarding a tunnel in a north end neighborhood and at grade in the south end

neighborhoods. Commissioner Blomberg stated that the frequency of traffic is greater in the north link than at the south end and that the ridership does not really change. He also pointed out that there is a tolerable at grade treatment at the north end. Commissioner Sheridan commented that there is not the same heavy traffic along Martin Luther King Way. Commissioner Eanes agreed. Commissioner

COMMISSION DISCUSSION

▪ 2005 Work Plan

Ms. Wilson asked the Commission to check for accuracy the project assignments for themselves. She also noted that Transportation Committee needed bolstering. She did commend Commissioner Fiori for his great contribution as a new member to the committee. She made not that Commissioner Krikawa's departure leaves a vacancy for the SPC rep on the Landmarks Board. Ms. Wilson noted that there has been some discussion about whether the Seattle Planning Commission should continue to have a rep. on the Landmarks Board.

Ms. Wilson pointed out that Northgate is not on the work plan. But that Commissioner Jerry Finrow would still act as the SPC liaison to the Northgate Stakeholders this year. She noted that they Executive Committee recommended that the Commission "declare victory" to the Mayor, City Council and City departments on breaking the gridlock at Northgate through its contributions these past 5 years .

There was discussion regarding what projects on the work plan are going to absorb the most time and which the least. Commissioner Owen advised that the Commission carefully consider what type of involvement and role the Commission will have in Center City and how it will relate to its many projects like south downtown, downtown zoning changes, South lake union which are all meaty projects with decision timelines and significant planning questions. Commissioner Sheridan felt that Industrial Lands could be more specifically described in the work plan as there are outside forces with a distinct schedule that inform the project.

Chair Blomberg noted that on the Alaskan Way Viaduct & Waterfront will involve SPC efforts with the roll out of the draft plan, continuing to comment on the plan this year and continuing on with the Joint Planning Commission Design Commission Waterfront subcommittee work. He noted that the Neighborhood Business District Strategy (NBDS) could be done by April. Bob Morgan, Central Staff, added that the environmental review of NBDS will likely conclude by the end of February and the City Council will make its decisions on the project in April. Commissioner Quintana requested to be removed as project lead on the Neighborhood Business District Strategy (NBDS) as he may have a potential conflict of interest.

Ms. Wilson noted that the Commission's work on the Transportation Strategic Plan is done for now until it goes to Council review. She stated that the Light Rail Review Panel will wrap quickly and the Commissions work will be focused on the Sound Transit's Long range plan and Phase 2. Chair Blomberg observed that station area planning was ending for the monorail project and that the Monorail Review Panel would be the Commission's focus this year.

Commissioner Owen asked about the status of the home ownership work item. He inquired if DADUs and cottage housing are still part of the program. Commissioner Eanes responded that there is a white paper planned on the broader topic of housing strategies and that it will aim to describe various housing issues and provide a list of tools or possible approaches. He noted that these tools will include DADUs and cottage housing as options. Commissioner Owen added that previous discussions had explored meetings with neighborhoods to promote DADUs and cottage housing. Commissioner Paul Tomita wondered if there was the political will to move forward on this. He recommended continuing to push for a partial roll out of the DADU/cottage housing strategy in a few neighborhoods. He also suggested reactivating and expanding a demonstration project again. Commissioner Eanes agreed that he liked the

demonstration approach. He observed that this is related to improving the low-rise code and the multi-family code as far as height limits. Ms. Wilson noted that Adrienne Quinn, the new director at the Office of Housing and a former Planning Commissioner as well as Rick Hooper, from the Office of Housing, will be invited to come to attend a Commission meeting later this year.

Chair Blomberg mentioned that the Commission would revisit the work plan at the next Full-Commission meeting to vote to approve it when a quorum is present. He recommended that Commissioners review their roles and give particular attention to the work products listed. Commissioner Sheridan.

DPD Planning Director Report

Chair Blomberg welcomed Planning Director, John Rahaim, and invited him to share with the Commission key issues and activities from City Planning. Mr. Rahaim reported that City Planning is in the process of hiring a full time manager for one year to work exclusively on Center City. He mentioned that the Planning Division is also finalizing a contract with a communications firm to pull together a comprehensive communications plan which will include working on message. Mr. Rahaim reported that the firm will hold meetings with staff, interview stakeholders, including the SPC, neighborhood groups, and property owners. He added that DPD will hold stakeholder meetings and workshops to solicit input to develop the strategy. He noted it will take approximately 3-4 months to develop the communication strategy.

Mr. Rahaim stated that another major piece of Center City is South Downtown which includes Pioneer Square, the International District and the area around the stadiums. He mentioned that the Stadium Overlay District is not necessarily working as intended and that one of the issues is how to make South Downtown more attractive for increased housing investment. Mr. Rahaim noted that an advisory group will be formed that will begin to meet monthly starting next month. He added that the Commission has been invited to participate in the advisory group. Ms. Wilson announced that Commissioner Sheridan will be the SPC's representative on the advisory group. She added that she hoped that the SPC's Roundtable Report and white paper on Center City would be shared with the consulting firm. Mr. Rahaim assured her that these documents have already been shared with the consultants. Ms. Wilson noted that the Commission is scheduled to meet with Deputy Mayor Tim Ceis to discuss Center City. Commissioner Sheridan expressed her hope that Center City would be an interactive community plan and not a public relations plan. Mr. Rahaim agreed with her that this is the intent.

In describing Center City Mr. Rahaim said that it involves coordinating the various neighborhoods and strategizing on how each neighborhood's strengths and weaknesses are complemented by the other Center City neighborhoods. Commissioner Blomberg pointed out that Center City is an economic engine for the region and that economic analysis would be beneficial. He stressed that this is an opportunity to present this economic information in a different way so that the public can see Center City in a different light.

Mr. Rahaim described the schedule for Center City. He stated that the first quarter would involve the communications planning work and that South Downtown planning work would occur in the first year. Zoning changes in South Downtown would likely occur at the end of 2005, start of 2006. He mentioned that there is a lot of interest in affordable housing that is connected to downtown but may not be located in downtown. He added that because of the proximity and linkages to downtown that they are considering a bigger geographic area for affordable housing. Mr. Rahaim noted that some stakeholders have expressed that the current code in South Downtown inhibits housing investment. He pointed out that a lot of the issues in this area are not code-related but include anti-social behavior on the streets and bar, entertainment, and nighttime activity. Mr. Rahaim noted that as part of the new staff person's work plan, the Center City neighborhood plans would be compiled and reviewed. He asked for the Planning Commission's help on prioritizing the analysis. Commissioner Owen offered the Commission's assistance in liaising with the Center City neighborhoods.

Neighborhood Business District Strategy (NBDS) Commercial Code Changes

Ms. Wilson announced that on February 17 the NBDS code changes are to be released noting there will be a 30 day SEPA process. She recommended that if the Commission wants to make any comments to DPD staff they need to be completed within the next couple of weeks. Commissioner Owen felt that it would be important that the letter state that with this limited amount of time that this was the best we could do and that we were not supporting the changes only commenting on them. After some discussion he also stated that the Commission should mention in the letter some "issues" that are of concern.

Mr. Rahaim explained that the rollout on February 17th will be the actual code language. Commissioner Owen responded that he feels this process should be slowed down and done right. Commissioner Quintana's response was that there are difficult ramifications if that happens and that, although there are several things he would change, he supports it. He pointed out that after two years it was time to move on and that the City Council will be looking at it closely.

Commissioner Blomberg asked if the SPC working draft comment letter contained all that it should. Commissioner Owen's response was no, that it did not and that the Commissioners should take the time to work on it. Commissioner Owen responded that business owners may not know about the parking reductions and additional ground level design. Ms. Wilson noted that currently there appears to be a lack of consensus from the Commission on the parking reductions requirement and that should be an item for further discussion.

Commissioner Eanes questioned whether the design guidelines in the code were adequate. He favored design review over design guidelines in the code. Commissioner Owen pointed out that another issue worth consideration is the issue of personal privacy with residential at street level. He recommended that window sills be located at least seven feet above ground so that the windows can be open. Otherwise, he noted, the blinds will always be shut and that creates a long blank building façade. Commissioner Eanes shared photographs of different street level designs and the resulting facades depending on access and window heights. He noted that some designs would require a ramp to access the second floor level and an elevator with double-sided cabs and a half stop.

Mr. Rahaim responded that he would like to put basic standards such as sill heights and stoop heights and that they were working on guidelines as separate from the code. Commissioner Blomberg noted that it is an issue of transparency. Commissioner Owen stated that he was an advocate of design guidelines but that we need standards to set the bar for design guidelines. He also asked if design guidelines are sufficient to ensure that desired street designs will be achieved.

Commissioner Owen stated his concerns about NC1 properties on arterials and the ground floor commercial requirements. Mr. Rahaim responded that there have been diverging viewpoints among staff on the small four-corner places. Commissioner Owen replied that it is important to retain the retail corner markets and that they provide an important neighborhood service. Mr. Morgan added that after the SEPA review is completed Central Staff will make a recommendation to City Council in late March.

Ms. Eanes suggested that staff send the working draft letter out for Commission review and pull together the Commissioners for a work session on the topic. Commissioner Eanes pointed out that it is important to winnow down the critical information such as allowing residential changes at street level, eliminating a penalty for single purpose, the proposed code language changes and the functional and locational criteria changes. Commissioner Eanes and Owen agreed to give only brief comments on the topic of parking reductions in this letter. There seemed to be general consensus on this. Commissioner Owen stated that he would like to reserve the right to monitor and keep an eye on the ramifications of the NBDS code changes. He expressed his interest in hearing neighborhood input on the changes. Commissioner Quintana recommended that the Commission stick to broad themes and major issues

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Chair Blomberg then invited public comment. He invited Chris Leman from the Eastlake Community Council to comment. Mr. Leman expressed his concerns about the public process for NBDS. He stated that it was a disservice to the City Council to have poor public process and no opportunity for the public to see the ordinance language. He agreed that there was general support to lower parking but the criteria and how parking reductions are administered is key. He mentioned that the Eastlake neighborhood has had growth and an increase in parking demand that is currently not met. He feels that there should be more public process on this before it goes to the City Council and that issues surrounding parking should be addressed.

Mr. Leman concluded with support for subsidized housing to be welcomed into the Eastlake neighborhood. He explained that current state and county rules do not encourage subsidized housing in the neighborhood. Chair Blomberg thanked him for his comments

Adjournment

Chair Blomberg adjourned the meeting at 5:30 pm